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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades, tutoring services have become an integral part of nearly every program at California's community colleges. The purposes of tutoring services are to provide individual attention to students in academic difficulty, training and assistance in developing effective study skills, assistance and support to special groups of students such as the physically handicapped or learning disabled, and to assist the instructor in skills courses or labs. Students who are recipients of tutoring services include students without the verbal and mathematical skills required for college work, students with disabilities, and older adults seeking retraining or beginning job skills. The benefits of tutoring include decreased dropout rates, improved student grades, and financial and educational benefits for tutors. With current funding concerns, many colleges have reduced their financial support of tutoring or learning assistance programs. The reduction or dismantling of tutoring programs may result in increased attrition, reduction of labs, increased demands on faculty, lower academic performance, increased rates of course repeats, harm to disadvantaged populations, slower student goal completion, reduction of the transfer rate, and ultimate increased costs to the state. The most obvious options for providing the financial support needed to maintain tutoring programs are through differential funding or generation of average daily attendance. (LAL)

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TUTORING: ESSENTIAL TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A Position Paper Presented by the Association for California Colleges

Tutorial and Learning Assistance

by

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TUTORING: ESSENTIAL TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Tutoring, in today's community colleges, is a learning activity that ordinarily involves a student who has been very successful in a particular subject working with one or more students who need additional assistance in the subject, both inside and outside of the classroom. The assistance provided may range from one or two brief interactions to intensive, frequent sessions. These sessions may be one-to-one or involve the tutor's working with a small group. They take place in learning centers, labs, and classrooms. They are considered a vital element of education by many students, faculty, and administrators.

The concept of the learning skills center with peer tutors has been an important contribution to education by community colleges. Roueche and Snow, in 1977, found 80 percent of the 137 community colleges they examined, nationwide, provided learning centers. Tutoring services at California community colleges have, in the past two decades, become an integral part of nearly every program, either under Instruction or Student Services. The most recent authoritative headcount in California was done by Wooley (1976), who found that 94 percent of California community colleges offered tutorial services.*As recognition has grown that even the "traditional" new college students are

*Only 12 of 42 colleges responding to a 1984 ACCTLA study indicated generating ADA by "tutee" classes (Petersen, 1984).

under-prepared and benefit from tutorial assistance, such programs have expanded to four-year colleges, both public and private. Such institutions as the campuses of the University of California and Stanford University provide tutoring and learning centers (Maxwell, 1979).

Goals of Tutoring

Purposes of the services include the following:

a) to provide individual attention and assistance for students who are having academic difficulty in class, to enable them to earn a better grade and, in many cases, help them to remain in the class and even in school;

b) to provide training and assistance in developing effective study skills, such as note-taking, time-management, textbook comprehension, and test-taking;

c) to provide assistance and support to special groups of students--such as the physically handicapped, the learning disabled, the non-native speakers of English, and even the re-entry older adults--all of whom need additional assistance and attention;

d) to assist the instructor in skills courses or labs, by providing supervised individual attention.

The Students

Who are served by tutoring services? Today's community colleges include large numbers of so-called "new students," who, a decade or two ago, would never have considered college. These are students whose previous low

academic performance and/or low socioeconomic background, and/or race or culture would have precluded their coming to college in previous years. Moore (1970) says that many of these students "come to the community college from rural areas, inner-city ghettos, and other decaying communities. Almost all have come from crippling schools" (p.56).

Grant and Hoeber (1978) add that many of these students

> have not acquired the verbal and mathematical and full range of cognitive skills required for collegiate work. Generally [the basic skills student] is a student whose grades fall in the bottom half of his high school class, who has not earned a [college preparatory] diploma, or is assigned to a high school which has a poor record for student achievement (p.7).

Concomitant with poor school skills are emotional and other self-concept problems. Roueche and Kirk (1973) tell us:

> The community college high-risk student, then, is often a hesitant, conservative low-achiever with serious self-doubts, lack of confidence, [and]. . . poor mental health. He asks to be taught but does not really believe he can learn because he has experienced a lifetime of academic failures. While he aspires to self-actualization, he believes that he will fail again (pp.69-70).

Another group of these "new students" are those whose aspirations have been encouraged because of the legislation directed at providing increased access to education for the handicapped. They include the learning disabled, who may just be discovering they are very capable, if only they are permitted to learn in special ways, and the physically handicapped--the wheelchair bound, the deaf, and the blind.

There is another group of students, who may also be of average or better ability, but who are now coming to college ill-prepared or "misprepared" to do academic work. They may

have actually received fairly good grades in academically weak high schools and may believe they are indeed adequately prepared. Evidence of this group is found in the declining SAT scores of the past decade and in the reduction in numbers of English, math, or other academic preparation courses taken by students since high schools "liberalized" requirements. Other factors contributing to the problems include grade inflation, automatic promotion, and reduction in homework assignments (Maxwell, 1979:18-19). Not only are these students often underprepared for the courses for which they enroll, but they are often woefully ignorant of the extent of their inadequacies.

Yet another group, and one representing a large portion of today's community college students are the older men or women who seek retraining or even beginning job skills. Many of these students bring burdensome family responsibilities, often coupled with serious self-doubts about their own abilities to handle college work.

And then there are the academically able students who simply have "math anxiety," "hate English" or have "computer phobia" and just need some reinforcement or assistance to help them through some difficult places and then will function well independently.

Benefits of Tutoring

Some may argue that it is futile for colleges to try to provide services for the truly high-risk students, since their

drop-out rate is so high. Six studies done by Terenzini and Pascarella (1980), however, contradict some earlier assumptions that the "traditional predictors" best identify the students most apt to leave college. They believe, on the basis of their studies, that the critical issue as to whether students remain in college is not what they bring with them but what happens to them once they are on campus, the exeriences they have on campus that make them feel they are accepted and can succeed. The most important determiners of persistence or withdrawal are "subject to the influence of institutional policies, programs, or conditions that affect students <u>after</u> their arrival on campus" (p.280).

The most significant of those conditions tends to be interactions with others--faculty, friends, or peer tutors who help the student to feel of value and to develop confidence that he or she can function successfully at college. The individual who has the time, the interest, and the skills to promote this confidence is perhaps most often the student tutor.

Although program evaluation has been too long delayed in many remedial programs, and is therefore somewhat sketchy, available evidence shows good results when students are tutored. For example, in his doctoral study, Agan (1971) found that 67 high-risk students who received tutring either in biology and English or math performed significantly higher than the non-tutored control groups. Yuthas (1971) examined

attrition in two experimental, high-risk groups in a reading class in a Denver community college, one taught by tutors only and one by regular instructors. She compared these students with remedial level students who did not take reading classes. There was a 67 percent attrition rate for the control group, compared to a 37 percent rate for both experimental groups, whether tutored or taught by instructors.

Some tutorial coordinators in California community colleges are now beginning to collect information about the effectiveness of their programs. For example, of 300 students who were tutored at De Anza College in the spring of 1981, 74 percent said that tutoring had improved their grades and an additional 19 percent said tutoring had helped "somewhat," for a total of 93 percent. Of the 200 who said they would be taking an advanced course in the subject for which they were tutored, 54 percent said they would be taking the advanced course because of the tutoring. Thirty-three percent of the total said they would have dropped the course if they had not had a tutor (Manriquez, 1981).

At Cypress College, Casselbury reported that 66 percent of 357 students who received 3 or more hours of tutoring in Spring, 1983, made grades of C or better (Casselbury, 1983).

Petersen of Sacramento City College's Learning Resources Division regularly polls her tutored students to evaluate the impact of tutoring. She found, for 951 students in Spring, 1983, 71 percent indicated they understood their work

considerably better, with an additional 22.5 percent saying they understood somewhat better; the numbers who were earning an A or B in class rose from 39 percent to 65 percent (Petersen,1983).

Eager, at Mira Costa College, found the drop rate of tutored students to be only 15 percent, compared to an overall college drop rate of 33 percent (Eager, 1984).

In a survey of 126 students who were tutored at Yuba College in 1980-81, 82 (65 percent) said tutoring had made a significant difference in their ability to pass the class for which they were being tutored (Rounds, 1981). In a 1983 survey of 92 students, 20 (22%) said without tutoring they would have dropped the class, and an additional 45 (46%) said they would have received a lower grade. Of 23 students who were initially receiving a D or F in the class, 10 (40%) eventually received at least a B; of 34 getting a C when they started tutoring, 21 (62%) ultimately received an A or B (Rounds, 1983).

At Santa Rosa College, eighty-five percent of 400 tutored students responding to a survey in the fall of 1981 said that tutoring had been "instrumental" in their achieving their academic goals in the classes for which they were tutored (Abrahams, 1984).

Among the benefits of tutoring that are often overlooked are those that accrue to the tutors. In addition to the financial assistance that may make the difference as to whether a capable student can remain in school, there is the

benefit derived from intense involvement with the subject matter. Ninety-eight percent of Petersen's 87 tutors in Spring, 1983, said that tutoring had helped them improve their own knowledge of subject matter. Many other students discover the rewards of helping others and choose careers in teaching or social work as a result of the tutoring experience.

While it is not possible to quantify the many personal benefits both to the students receiving the help as well as to those doing the tutoring, a few selected student comments may provide a sample of reactions:

> "I cannot broadcast enough the good work the Yuba College Learning Center is doing for the self-esteem of its students. . . . I no longer feel I am a failure and I am in hopes of earning a degree. . . a dream I would not have thought possible one year ago."
>
> "The LSC introduced me to a whole new life, a life I thought was reserved for others."
>
> "For the first time in my life I began to learn how to learn. . . . I began to realize there were no limits to my abilities except those tht my own lack of desire to learn placed on me" (comments excerpted from a report by Rounds, 1981).

Supporting the Program

Tutoring services are provided on most campuses through a combination of funding sources. Most colleges use a variety of categorical funds: EOPS money, VEA money, and perhaps AB 77 funds. These dollars, however, can not be used to assist most transfer students who may be struggling with certain subjects and also need help to complete <u>their</u> eductional goals. To provide assistance for this group, as well as to provide

classified and/or certificated staff, colleges often use district funds. To help defray costs of the program, some colleges have identified tutoring, when supervised by a credentialed instructor, as a credit or non-credit course, appropriate for ADA collection. (In a recent sample of 42 colleges, Petersen [1984] found that 24 colleges indicated they generated ADA: 10 through the tutors in a training class, 12 through classes for tutees, and for 2 it was unclear.)

Impact of Reductions

With current funding concerns, many colleges have reduced support of tutoring or learning assistance programs. In Petersen's sample, 13 respondents (30 percent) said funds had been cut the past year, and 4 (10 percent) had had staff cuts. Other changes being discussed at state and local levels may well impact further. What are the possible effects on colleges if tutoring programs are reduced or dismanted?

1. Although retention studies are somewhat limited, there is evidence (see above) that attrition is reduced for tutored students; elimination or reduction of services would increase attrition.

2. Many labs now available to students could not operate without tutorial assistance, or could do so only at a prohibitive cost; these classes would be dropped or substantially modified. In some cases, many additional sections of smaller classes would be needed, thus increasing costs to the college.

3. Demands on faculty for assistance could not be met during time available out of class.

4. Academic performance would drop, since most tutored students improve their grades and subject-knowledge as a result of tutoring.

5. Course repeats by students who were unable to complete courses successfully the first time would increase, thus increasing costs to the colleges.

6. Disadavantaged populations would be hurt disproportionately; these students tend to be at greater risk and have a greater need for assistance.

7. Students returning to college for upgrading skills or acquiring new ones or making career changes would be slowed in completing goals and in their ability to return to the work force.

8. Numbers of students completing transfer requirements would be reduced, as many of these students need help with their requirements and general education courses.

9. Retention among the many highly-skilled tutors could be affected if they were unable to earn additional monies, in a job tailored to their academic schedule, to stay in school.

10. Ultimate cost to the state could well be considerable, because the population most in need of additional training, in order to become self-sufficent and stay off welfare rolls and out of other state programs, would be the

group most affected by lack of assistance. (It has been estimated, for example, that the increased income taxes collected from veterans who attended college on the GI Bill, because of their higher earning power, "more than reimbursed the federal government for the cost of their education before most of them [were] forty years of age" (Johns & Morphet, 1960: p. 377)).

Options for Maintenance of Tutoring Programs

Given the obvious value and importance of tutoring services, it would appear to be essential that funding for these services be maintained, and ways must be found to provide this maintenance. The most obvious options are through differential funding or through generation of ADA.

1. Differential Funding. Under differential funding, tutoring, as a valued part of community college education, would be funded as an essential service. This is a complex option, given today's funding problems; however, it remains a viable option. One possible way to use a modified differential funding approach would be to mandate a formula for a using a certain percent of regularly collected ADA for learning assistance. (For example, the Spring, 1984, issue of the Journal of Developmental and Remedial Education describes a Florida experiment, in which the state has agreed to fund student contact hours used for educational support services [Friedlander]).

2. ADA Generation. One option under existing law is to

require labs in remedial courses for all students, and to place tutors in the labs for assistance. The labs would, however, have to be supervised by appropriately credentialled instructors.

A second option is to offer a specific Study Techniques class, with a lecture section; trained tutors would be available in the lab portion to help with the application of study techniques to various course material.

A third option would be to explore the feasibility of offering tutoring as a non-credit adult education course.

Conclusion

Tutoring is remarkably cost-effective in ways that are, unfortunately, not easy to validate with figures. When one observes a small group of recent immigrants working determinedly with a serious youn, tutor, a wheelchair-bound victim of an auto accident poring over accounting homework with a re-entry adult, or a frustrated computer novice being soothed by the competent lab assistant, one recognizes that these people are becoming independent wage-earners sooner as a result of this help.

Students needing extra academic assistance to complete their educational and vocational goals are an incredibly diverse group; for the most part-- whether they are entering directly from high school, from unsuccessful job experience, or even after years of being in the home--they are under-prepared

and ill-equipped to compete successfully in college. One of the most effective ways to help these students is through academic tutoring.

The Association for California College Tutorial and Learning Assistance would like to go on record as affirming that the many benefits of tutorial assistance are essential to the achievement of the mission of California community colleges and that it must be supported by the state in all appropriate ways. Maintenance of the programs requires that support be provided by the state both philosophically and financially.

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